

PLOTINIAN PERSONALITY XXV — ESTATE

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This lesson in the Enneads of Plotinus is a consideration of The Soul's Descent into Body through sections four to eight of the tractate, and the ultimate fullness of living is here the creative power of wholeness by which the soul always gives ultimate expression to itself. Perhaps this is the saving grace of personality in an emergency or through some bitter issue of life. Where man hangs his hat he is at home and within the narrow limits of the immediate constriction he erects a transient and convenient but actual wholeness. The individual in this way is forever lord of his domain. If he is utterly defeated in life his retreat will be to a domain in phantasy, but there yet will be the one piece of ground essentially his own. Personality in its true self-development or in the conscious life of a broad fellowship of human kind gains its richness by a sharing of the grounds of being, and the livingness will be a balance in a choice of realities. The creativeness will be unabsorbed in defensive measures of any sort, and so will reach its full in the conscious realities of the group. Here is the normal activity of life both on physical levels and in the higher realms of self-expression with man balanced among his fellows in a general sharing of all experience and all values. Plotinus demonstrates the eternal or ultimate touch of soul with its own lofty estate in this fact that it always gets a place of its own. Weary of standing apart from the All, in his imagery, it proceeds to manifest its own nature. It has a sense of alness and this it executes in the circumstances of its own immediate being. The process is well illustrated in the groups of humanity separated from the creative center of their own kind. Sensing the separation, they adhere rigorously to the exactness of the values brought with them from center and apart from real creativeness they cling creatively and effectively to the fullness of their conscious tradition. Thus certain mountaineers of North America long retained their colonial culture and always there will be settlers in far places who duplicate a wee bit of the motherland. Soul strikes the balance whenever an issue of life calls it to itself, and this is one real foundation in human personality. Soul still is soul even when almost totally captive to matter or visible existence. When it cannot return to its divine estate it yet and notwithstanding can and does return to the genius of its own kind in a bit of its true self.

The dynamic of consciousness is this capacity of soul to return to its own estate either in dogged lower preservation of its genius or in larger reunion with higher glory as in its great moments of illumination. At no point is Plotinus more triumphant than here, or

more sure of his interpretation of the Platonic system. He speaks from his own experiences in ecstasy! The soul yet can soar, swing eternally upward! This he sees not only in the striking emotional revelations of a devotional life but in the common transcendence of situation by intelligence. To him the conversion towards the intellectual act or the subjection of impulse and reaction to judgment and intuition is the true soaring of the soul and the self-elevation of personality in the narrow compass of its personal domain. The soul is loosed from the shackles by its own creative power.

The sustaining value in personality is the completeness toward which it always strikes. The balance of human consciousness is the realization of this completeness as actually present in every human experience. In order to strengthen the realization Plotinus again draws an analogy from the cosmic mechanism, and in this particular reference and its paradox he betrays once more the true Hegelian slant of his mind. The emanations that are the basis of creation are the successive pilgrimages downward by which immortal entities surrender their high estate to become entrapped in bondage, and yet God's purposes are served by this descent of soul and the whole is not a cosmic tragedy but rather an orderly process. The soul suffers no ill if it returns quickly or remains conscious at all times of its real nature. The student by his realization of the all-embracing God's purposes is spared from the sense of infinite regress in an endless and pointless process. He is lifted above the chance of any loss of reality in his thinking act by an awakening to the fact that this all is a mechanism of thinking.

The social genius of the soul is found in responsibility downward as a group obligation of being. The upward return is to unity in an immortalization of identity. Its reverse therefore is a contribution to consciousness-creating partness in the whole. Every kind must produce its next downward, Plotinus explains, and shows this to be akin to the unfolding of life in the seed or a bringing to fruition in group life of the genius nurtured in the core of selfhood to establish potentiality in experience. The soul still touches the Supreme, and it must show forth supremacy in its act. The practical aspect of personality is the supremacy that it thus shows forth in the business of everyday. Mere interactions in the realm of matter are without true consciousness. They are of passing reality only. But personality touches things to balance or to a sense of sure participation in wholeness. This is the loveliness of the sense realm, in the phrase of Plotinus, or what to him is the index of the nobleness in the intellectual. The balance in the external and superficial dealings of a man of personality are the clue to his possession of an inner life and light.

The individuality of personality lies in its mid-rank in the mechanism of human consciousness. For a personal wholeness it is nec-

essary that diversity or distribution of potentiality be possible, and this is provided in the one direction by the habit nature or the diffusion of response to the world of flux and in the other by the intellectual or imaginative mental nature in which the diffusion of infinite potentiality is met by a distribution of the image-forming faculty. Personality is individual balance linking the soul's descent to experience with its ascent to ultimate potential. It binds participation in life with a revelation of higher life. By personality man always is brought back to balance so that as paradoxically as Plotinus points out the experience of evil can actually bring the clearer perception of good. Personality is the balance in knowing or the wholeness of absolute existence. The ultimate distinction of personality is its sense of absoluteness in existence or eternality in balance. In his soul man is successfully himself and when this is voiced by personality or sealed in experience through the accompaniment of act by imagination he adds immortality to his stature. Plotinus states that the desire locked up within the desiring faculty remains unknown except as possessed by the central faculty of perception or the personality, and New Thought and occultism move always to release desire and culture new impetus of soul-activity while at the same time stirring the highest possible ethical ideals in the imagination. The soul is something upward and something downward, or balance as a living and constant participation by self-wholeness in the total wholeness of the All.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND APPLICATION

- (1) What is the difference between the transient wholeness a man establishes and the ultimate wholeness soul realizes? How does the man's piece of ground differ from the soul's lofty estate? In what way are they both part of the same whole?
- (2) Can soul even be lost in its descent into visible existence? Explain. How does Plotinus interpret Plato in this respect? What hope does he offer?
- (3) What basic realization is responsible for continued balance in human consciousness? How does Plotinus here further explain the descent of soul? Why is this more clear to the student? What interpretation helps?
- (4) What is the next downward which every kind must produce? How does personality always maintain its balance? Balance between what extremes?
- (5) What is your understanding of the mid-rank of personality in the mechanism of human consciousness? By what technique does a man add immortality to his stature? How do New Thought and the occult stir the individual to the steps that upset and restore balance?